

175 the Bedouins of the Hijaz area. This Sanusi success aroused
795 the jealousy and animosities of the orthodox 'ulama ("clergy")
• [798] of the Mecca area. Al-Sanusi was forced to flee the Arabian
[793] peninsula, and in 1843 he founded his first zawiya ("lodge"),
[346] al-zawiya al-baida, in Cyrenaica. The Sanusi doctrine was as
acceptable to the Bedouins of Cyrenaica as it had been to the
tribes of the Hijaz. The person and teachings of al-Sanusi
[793] al-kabir ("the grand Sanusi"), as he came to be known, fit
into the "holy man" religious tradition of Cyrenaica and even
spread beyond into the Sudan and Lake Chad area. The Order
showed primary concern for the people of the desert: the
[793] Sanusi shaikh ("holy man") cared for the poor, and the zawiya
[346] became rest stops, storehouses, and religious centers where
[485] Bedouin children were taught their Quranic lessons. Through
[794] the zawiya, the Sanusiyya became a political and economic
175 integrating factor in the desert, and al-Sanusi became the
795 legitimate authority of the Bedouins. The zawiya became a
346 very important part of the traditional desert economic system.
182 Today one zawiya remains near al-Qasr but it is scarcely used.
[793] The Bedouins say: "Before, when Alexandria was far away by
camel, we could get what we wanted at the zawiya. Now that we
have trucks and trains no one goes to the zawiya."

175 The fortunes of the Bedouin became linked with those
795 of the Order. When the Sanusi became involved in full-scale
648 conflict with the Italian colonial power, the Bedouins bore

[P.1]

CHAPTER I

ORIGIN AND EXPANSION OF THE
SANUSIYA (1837-1902)

I

THE Sanusiya is an Order of Sufis or, as they are sometimes called, Darwishes. They are Sunni or orthodox Muslims. This means that in faith and morals they accept the teachings of the Koran and the *Sunna*, a collection of traditions about the life and habits of the Prophet, whose example in all matters should be followed by believers. Most orthodox Muslims recognize two further doctrinal sources, *ijma'*, general agreement among those of the faithful capable of holding an opinion on such matters, and *qiyas*, determination of what should be believed or done by analogy with the teachings and life of the Prophet. The founder of the Sanusiya Order, like other teachers of some of the more rigidly orthodox groups, such as the Wahhabi, rejected both, though, in practice, he made use of what amounts to analogy. Of the four canonical rites of orthodox Islam the Sanusi of Cyrenaica, like the founder of their Order, follow the Maliki, the rite dominant throughout North Africa. 795*

The Sanusiya is, therefore, a highly orthodox Order. It is not a sect, but a fraternity. The enemies of its founder were never able to convince any disinterested person that he was guilty of heresy, though they attempted to do so; and it was only in very small matters that they were able to accuse him of departing from the Maliki rite. Even its Sufism is conventional and austere. The Wahhabi, those stern and ruthless critics of the sects and Orders of Islam, found in it no *bid'a*, innovation, which in the eyes of these fanatics amounts to heresy, and, alone among the Sufi Orders, they have tolerated its presence in the Hijaz. 798

Sufism is Islamic mysticism. Orthodox Islam tends to be a cold and formalistic religion. The gulf between God and man, spanned by the bridge of the Imams among the Shi'ites, is too wide for simple people, and its rules and regulations deprive it of warmth and colour. The need for personal contact and tenderness finds expression in the cult of saints, in Sufi 795*

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- *795 The desire to establish in North Africa conditions in which
793 Muslims might live by their own laws and under their own
• 798 government, as they did in Arabia under the first four Caliphs,
177 led the Grand Sanusi and his successors to oppose the Turkish
way of life and the influences and innovations of Western
Christendom, but their intransigence in these matters did not
imply intolerance, far less aggressiveness. Though some
writers have made assertions to the contrary, the Sanusi have
never shown themselves more hostile than other Muslims to
Christians and Jews, and the Grand Sanusi and Sayyid al-
Mahdi scrupulously avoided all political entanglements which
might bring them into unfriendly relations with neighbouring
States and the European Powers. The Brothers of the Order
*795 were discouraged from discussing political questions. Nor were
793 the Sanusi intolerant towards fellow Muslims who differed from
798 them. Shaikh Muhammed 'Uthman records of Sayyid al-Mahdi
that 'the persons he dislikes the most are those who speak ill
of Muslims'.¹ The leaders of the Sanusiya have always tolerated
other and rival Orders, even when they have disapproved of
their rites. The Grand Sanusi had himself been a member of a
succession of Orders before he started his own and he allowed,
as his successors have done, members of other Orders to belong
to the Sanusiya at the same time.
- *795 The leaders of the Order have also been tolerant towards the
792 cult of saints, unlike the iconoclastic Wahhabi, who have
798 destroyed even the tombs of those nearest to the Prophet him-
796 self. The view held by the doctors of orthodox Islam is that,
798 though intercession through a saint is unlawful and the only
mention of him during prayers at his tomb should be to ask the
mercy of God on his soul, it is permissible to show respect to his
tomb and his memory. The heads of the Sanusiya have, how-
ever, always tolerated among their Bedouin followers a regard
for holy men and their tombs which goes beyond mere respect.
It is unlikely that they felt any repugnance to the cult, because
they counted among their forbears several saints and were
themselves brought up in North Africa where the cult of saints
is widespread and very near to the hearts of the common people;
and they could not have remonstrated with the Bedouin for
believing that holy men and their tombs are sources of *baraka*,

¹ Op. cit., p. 121.

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divine blessing, since it was because the Bedouin believed the Sanusi family had the same virtue that they accepted their leadership.

The resemblance often alleged between the Sanusi and the Wahhabi movements, on the grounds of like puritanism, literalism, and fanaticism, cannot be substantiated. It is obvious that there must be resemblances between new religious movements: they usually claim to be a return to primitive faith and morals and they are generally missionary and enthusiastic. There is no great significance in such common characteristics of the two movements. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the Grand Sanusi was directly influenced by Wahhabi propaganda. A more significant comparison between the two might be made by tracing their developments from religious into political movements. Both started as religious revivals among backward peoples, chiefly Bedouin, the Wahhabi movement in the Nadj in the eighteenth century and the Sanusi movement first in the Hijaz and then in Cyrenaica in the middle of the nineteenth century; the *Ikhwan* organizations of the two movements have much in common; and both ended in the formation of Amirates, or small Islamic States.

Both movements have created States, the Wahhabi in Arabia and the Sanusi in Cyrenaica, based explicitly on religious particularism. In doing so they have only done what any movement of the kind is bound to do in a barbarous country if it is to continue to exist, namely, to create an administrative system which would ensure a measure of peace, security, justice, and economic stability. A religious organization cannot exist apart from a polity of a wider kind. But they did not create the sentiment of community which made the growth of governmental functions and the emergence of a State possible.

Religious divisions in Islam have commonly been the expression of a sense of social and cultural exclusiveness. The support given to the 'Alids in Persia and Arabia, to the Umayyads in Africa and Spain, to the Fatimids in Egypt, to the Kharijites by the Berbers in North Africa, and the adoption of extreme Shi'ite doctrines by the mountaineers of Syria and by the Kurds, and of Isma'ili teachings in parts of India, were all reactions against foreign domination as much as revolts against orthodoxy. The religious deviation was the expression of the intense desire

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*795 of a people to live according to their own traditions and institu-
182 tions. To-day this desire is expressed in the political language
177 of nationalism. In the past it was expressed in religious move-
171 ments. Arab nationalism is not a new phenomenon. Only its
[668] dress is new.

*795 As will be seen in the chapters which follow, conditions in
182 Cyrenaica were particularly favourable to the growth of a
politico-religious movement such as the Sanusiya became. It
was cut off by deserts from neighbouring countries, it had a
homogeneous population, it had a tribal system which em-
braced common traditions and a strong feeling of community
of blood, the country was not dominated by the towns, and the
Turkish administration exercised very little control over the
interior. It was, as will be seen, the tribal system of the Bedouin
which furnished the Order with its political foundations just as
it was the tribesmen of the country whose hardiness and courage
enabled it to stand up to the succession of defeats it had to
endure.

*795 The reasons for the political success of the Sanusiya Order in
193 Cyrenaica will appear in the course of this account, and here I
182 wish to draw attention to one of them only. It has been said
[792] that its rites and teachings were, like the Bedouin character,
[798] austere without being fanatical, and that it tolerated the cult
of saints to which the Bedouin were accustomed, the Grand
Sanusi becoming, in fact, a kind of national saint; but it must
be added that the acceptability of its teachings and the fact
that the Grand Sanusi could at once be placed by the Bedouin
in the familiar category of *Marabtin*, holy men coming to
preach and settle in Cyrenaica from the west, cannot alone
account for the remarkable success of the Sanusiya movement.
The Bedouin of Cyrenaica had heard similar teachings before
from similar teachers and had paid them the same degree
of attention as they paid to the Grand Sanusi, but these
earlier missionaries won only a personal and local following for
themselves and their descendants, whereas the Grand Sanusi
established himself and his family as leaders of a national
movement, a position they have now held for three generations.

[792] Leaving aside the remarkable personality of the Grand Sanusi
[798] and without here discussing whether the time at which he
taught was particularly favourable to the growth of the move-

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number of Orders before he founded his own. It has been recorded that he was influenced by the Moroccan Tijaniya Order and that at Mecca he became the favourite pupil of the founder of the Idrisiya Order, which derived its tenets from the basic Shadhiliya Order. In his student days he became a member of other Orders: Shadhiliya, Nasiriya, Qadariya, and perhaps others.¹ His catholicism was not peculiar among the Sufis, and in his case he seems to have joined a large variety of Orders with the deliberate intention of learning their rites and doctrines at first hand so that he could combine all that was best in each of them in a new Order which would be the crown of Sufi thought and practice. It must not be supposed that on this account his teaching was a mere amalgam of the tenets of earlier Orders. Original it was not, but it was a consistent and carefully thought out way of life.²

The new Sanusiya Order made such rapid progress, especially among the Bedouin of the Hijaz,³ that it excited the jealousy and fear of the various authorities in Mecca, the 'Ulama, the Sharifs, and the Turkish Administration. There can be little doubt that the real objections to the Order were that it threatened the prestige and privileges of these authorities, but they were framed in less revealing language. It seems to have been held against the Order that it lowered Sufi standards to accommodate itself to Bedouin laxity in religious matters, and that it verged on heresy. (798) •

Faced with serious opposition the Grand Sanusi did what his teacher Sayyid Ahmad Idris had done in similar circumstances: he left the Hijaz, in about 1841, accompanied by many of his disciples, to return to his native land. After spending some months in Cairo, he continued his journey westwards to Siwa oasis, where he was taken sick and spent several weeks recuperating and instructing the people of the oasis in the faith. In the following year he reached Tripoli by the desert route. On his way to Qabis from that town he heard of the new French advances in his homeland and decided in view of them to return to Tripoli and thence to Banghazi. It would appear therefore

¹ Ibid., p. 6; Adams, op. cit., p. 22.

² Carlo Giglio, *La Confraternità Senussita dalle sue Origini ad Oggi*, 1932, p. 17.

³ A. Le Chatelier, *Les Confréries Musulmanes du Hedjaz*, 1887, passim.

THE SANUSIYA AND THE TRIBES

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absolutely obligatory and sinful to omit. I very much doubt whether many of the Bedouin know how to pray in the prescribed manner. As I have mentioned earlier, the Bedouin used to give alms to their zawiyas and in doing so they carried out one of the five major duties of a Muslim, but they regarded these alms as charity rather than legal dues. I have never met an ordinary Bedouin who had been to Mecca, or who even contemplated going there. Nevertheless, however lax they may be in other things, all Cyrenaican Bedouin keep the fast of Ramadan, and in this annual fast is summed up for them, more than in anything else, the obligations and privileges of Islam and its unity and strength. Moreover, although they are negligent Muslims themselves they respect piety in others. Brothers of the Sanusiya Order and religious men in general ought to pray regularly. That is their business and it is very necessary for the well-being of the community and worthy of liberal support, but the Bedouin is an unlettered man, a shepherd, and a warrior, and he has his own affairs to see to. Perhaps the Bedouin make up for their shortcomings by their enthusiasm for the *jihad*, holy war against unbelievers. They consider that they have fulfilled their obligation under this head in ample measure by their long and courageous fight, formally declared a holy war by the Caliph of Islam, against the Italians, the French, and the British. A Bedouin once said to me when I remarked how rarely I had seen Bedouin at prayer: '*nasum wa najhad*', '(but) we fast and we wage holy war'.

It must also be said that it would be an error to suppose that Islam had not, long before the time of the Grand Sanusi, strongly affected the character and custom of the Sulaimid Bedouin. This question, which is far from simple, need not be discussed in the present account and it is only necessary to note that the Bedouin assume that their customs are Muslim customs. It would also be a questionable judgement to assert that the Bedouin of Cyrenaica are not religious because they do not pay the same attention to outward ritual as do townspeople and peasants, for piety and holiness, as we have often been admonished, are not the same. The Bedouin certainly have a profound faith in God and trust in the destiny He has prepared for them and this faith and trust enhance that superb dignity

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*795 which have a Maghribi origin and those which were founded in Iraq. Egyptian Orders are not represented in Cyrenaica. These facts are explained when it is pointed out that the Orders found in Cyrenaica to-day were introduced by urban immigrants from the west who settled in Benghazi and Darna as traders and artisans. Whence follows the most important feature of the [69] non-Sanusiya Orders, their urban character. With the exception of the Madaniya and a single lodge of the 'Arusiya, these Orders are represented only in the towns. Occasionally one of their lodges was built with aid from local tribesmen, as the 'Arusiya lodges at al-Marj and Tubruq, but such examples are rare and in no way invalidate the statement that the Sanusiya alone has considerable following among the Bedouin. The adherents of the single 'Arusiya lodge at Bu Zaid are Bedouin of the Aulad al-Shaikh, immigrants from Tripolitania who regard themselves as direct descendants of Sidi 'Abd al-Salam, the founder of the Order whose rite they follow. The only competitor of the Sanusiya among the Bedouin was the Madaniya, which still retains its hold on the Fawakhir of the *barqa*, a tribe ill disposed towards any authority, and a few *Marabtin* fragments elsewhere, though these Bedouin now follow Sanusiya leadership in other than purely religious matters.

- [798] There was at one time tension between the two Orders, complicated by tribal rivalries in the *barqa*, but it has now been for the greater part resolved. Apart from the opposition of the Sanusiya, the loss of influence of the Madaniya was hastened by its too close attachment to the fortunes of the declining Ottoman Caliphate, dissensions between the descendants of its founder, and a split in the Order itself.

*795 The Sanusiya has always shown marked tolerance towards
798 other Orders and it must, moreover, be noted that there are no doctrinal differences between the Orders, that members of different Orders worship together in the same mosques, and that sometimes a man is a member of several orders at the same time. We have seen that the Grand Sanusi in his early period [793] joined a number of different Orders and our Tunisian friend Shaikh Muhammad 'Uthman seems to have made a hobby of joining them.¹ Furthermore, the founders of all the Orders are revered as saints by the common people everywhere, regardless

¹ Op. cit., pp. 64-6 and 251.

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of their affiliations. Hence the Sanusiya does not oppose the other Orders in the towns on a religious plane, although it does not approve of those which are convulsionary, and they do not compete with it politically. It is only in the interior that the Order will not permit a rival, because competition for the allegiance of the Bedouin must be political. Italian efforts to play off these Orders against the Sanusiya were founded on ignorance of the nature of an Islamic *tariqa* and seem to have been ineffectual. [648]*

Since almost all the non-Sanusiya lodges are urban it follows that the history of the growth and spread of the Orders is part of the general history of the growth and spread of the urban centres of Cyrenaica. Some of the older lodges in Benghazi and Darna are over 150 years old, but most of them and all those in the smaller administrative centres date from late Turkish times or were built during the Italian occupation. An urban lodge is generally a small, very simple, structure and its members seldom total more than 50 to 100. It may be regarded as a kind of club, founded for religious exercises, for the performance of good works, and for social insurance. It also serves as a resthouse for travelling members of the Order and as a *malja*, a place of refuge for the poor and the sick. Few of the lodges are endowed, and most are very poor. [575] [485]

I do not wish to underestimate the social and, in the broadest sense, political importance of the urban Orders in Cyrenaica. They provide the only spontaneous and co-operative associations in the towns and thus fill a gap for ordinary people both in the town society and in a religion which pays little attention either to corporeal works or, outside the mosques, to corporate worship. Outside the lodges of the Orders there were in Turkish times no associations dispensing charity or giving education, and worship in the mosques within the wide society of Islam does not provide the intimacy and colour men need in acts of common devotion. The lodges give to their members a double attachment and a double security, membership of a welfare association, which gives them a feeling of material security, and membership of a devotional group, which gives them a feeling of spiritual security. Also, in spite of their lack of numbers and organization, the urban lodges are links in chains which, running through Islamic countries and cutting across natural [795*] [182]

III

*175 What gave the Bedouin the courage to endure the hardships
*648 and bereavements of the struggle? Certainly those two great
*795 sentiments, patriotism and religion. I have said that the first
Italo-Sanusi war began as a war against Turkey and slowly
became transformed into a war against the Sanusiya. The war
against the Sanusiya also became transformed slowly into a
simple struggle of the Bedouin for survival, for their lands and
their freedom to live their ancient way of life; and in this
struggle they felt themselves, in spite of all their cleavages and
fends, to be at one against the intruder. Beneath the surface
of political expressions the issue was the same in both wars:
whether the Italians could deprive the Bedouin of their lands
and colonize them. Whether the Bedouin fought in the name
of the Sultan or of the Sanusiya, or just fought, they always
realized, from the first days of the struggle, that the issue was
their right to live by their own laws in their own land. In the
first war the outer bark of Turkish administration was stripped.
(619) In the second war the inner bark of Sanusiya organization was
ripped off, leaving bare beneath it the hard wood of the tribal
system.

*175 The war also, as wars have a way of doing, bared the religious
*648 content in the struggle. The Caliph had declared a religious war,
*795 but when the Caliphate no longer counted in Cyrenaica, or
721 indeed anywhere else, the war continued to be fought in the
• 798 name of a religious Order. With the destruction of the Sanusiya
619 it still went on in the name of religion. It then became simply
a war of Muslims to defend their faith against a Christian
Power. Deep love of home and deep love of God nourished
each other. In fighting for their lands and herds the Bedouin
were fortified by the knowledge that they fought also for
their faith. Without due appreciation of the religious feelings
involved in the resistance it would, I think, be impossible to
understand how it went on for so long against such over-
whelming odds or how the tribes, with a long history of feuds
dividing them, co-operated as much as they did under Sanusiya
guidance.

*175 From their experiences in the first war the Italians had learned
*648 to expect that they would be more strongly resisted in Cyrenaica
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